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Black Panthers Called Disenchanted With Cuba

By Fenton Wheeler

HAVANA, June 25 (AP) — American Black Panthers have become disenchanted with their lives as expatriates in Cuba and want to leave, according to a party member.

Raymond Johnson, 22 of Alexandria, La., who said he was a lieutenant in the Black Panthers and had hijacked an airliner, told a newsman today: "The Panthers have not been received in a revolutionary fashion. We have been condemned to live in Cuba."

He said members had been imprisoned, sent to labor camps, banned from Havana and told they could not organize their party in Cuba.

Johnson said, "It is possible some of the Panthers will be arrested today," adding that arrests "always come when the Panthers become disen-

chanted and after they protest conditions and express a desire to leave the country."

'Peculiar' Prejudice

"We think there's racial discrimination in Cuba," he said.

"It's a peculiar kind of racial discrimination. In some ways it's comparable to attitudes in the United States. White Cubans have a subconscious conspiracy to maintain control of the island.

"We feel the Cubans have a misunderstanding of the political, cultural and revolutionary thinking of black Americans, but primarily of the cultural aspect of the black revolution."

Johnson said the Panthers had been discouraged from talking to black Cubans about black awareness and the wearing of Afro hair styles. He said most of the Panthers

would like to go to Africa, but have been told not to contact African embassies in Havana.

More than 30 per cent of Cuba's 8 million people are of African ancestry.

[Most visitors to Cuba, regardless of their politics, have said that they found virtually no evidence of racial discrimination. Premier Castro has said it existed before his revolution, one consequence of U.S. domination.]

Silent on Cleaver

Johnson turned aside questions about Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver on security grounds, but added: "An exceedingly high-ranking Black Panther officer doesn't like the treatment of black revolutionaries and the Black Panthers here at all." Cleaver, information minister of the party, is living in Havana.

Johnson did not know how many Panthers lived in Cuba.

A former student at Southern University in Baton Rouge, La., Johnson said he was jailed for 21 days here after hijacking a National Airlines jet on Nov. 4, 1968.

He said his motive in hijacking the plane carrying 50 passengers and a crew of 7 was to seek asylum in Cuba as a political refugee. At the time he was a fugitive from an arson charge in Baton Rouge.

Hijacking Story

[In Miami, the FBI said Johnson was one of the more "vicious" of the hijackers. "He called the passengers 'economic devils' and stood over the captain throughout the flight, continually hitting him over the head with a cocked .38 revolver," an FBI agent said.]

Johnson said he was so distraught when he entered the cockpit that he told the pilot to take him to Miami instead of Cuba.

"The pilot told me we already were headed toward Miami, so I told him I meant Havana. I was completely hysterical at the time."

Johnson, a slightly built man, said this was the only time he got nervous.

"The rest of the time I was in complete control," he added.

Johnson said he would have had no compunction about taking "50 white capitalists with me" if he had been forced to shoot his revolver during the hijacking.

He said he went to the plane's washroom and donned his Black Panther outfit, forced a stewardess to take



Associated Press

RAYMOND JOHNSON

"... we've been condemned"

him to the cockpit, then announced over the plane's public address system that he was christening the jet "the Republic of New Africa."

He said he robbed the passengers of about \$400 "as a matter of humiliation."